

Developing a Statement on the Use of Generative AI by PGRs

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Overview

- Introductions
- A little bit about Sussex
- Impetus for developing a statement
- Approach to developing a statement:
 - Research
 - Key aspects of the statement
 - Consultation and approval
- Learning
- Further reading

About Sussex

- Overall student population c. 17.8k FTE (HESA 2023/24)
- PGR headcount c. 1,200 (internal data; all stages)
- Comprehensive, research-intensive university
- Ten academic Schools – highly devolved, but moving to faculties
- Sussex Researcher School:
 - Sits in Research & Innovation division
 - Remit = junior, postgraduate and early career researchers
 - 17 members of staff

Context

- Sussex undertook a full review of PGR regulations and policies during 2023/24, during which some gaps were identified, including around the use of generative AI (GenAI) by PGRs
- There was not enough time to fit this in during the review, plus the sector response was continuing to be shaped = parked to 2024/25
- Sussex had already developed some statements in the education space, including highlighting ethical issues around using GenAI
- Seeking to expand on that earlier work, an institution-wide summit was held in April 2025 to develop a set of key principles

Approach: Research

- Started from a very low point of understanding, so attended relevant talks at sector events (ARC, UKCGE, Vitae, etc) to learn
- Utilised networks to obtain copies of similar policies or statements at other institutions (*we got hold of 13*)
- Reading new statements from governing bodies and funders as they emerged, e.g.
 - European Commission's [Living guidelines on the Responsible use of generative ai in research](#) (March 2024)
 - Russell Group's [Principles on the use of generative AI tools in education](#) (January 2025)

Approach: Drafting

- Including clear definitions
- Drawing connections with other institutional documentation
- Outlining potential, limitations and risks of using GenAI
- Describing good academic practice in relation to the use and outputs of GenAI (e.g. appropriate referencing)
- Drawing boundaries around unacceptable use (e.g. using to generate all or a substantial part of a summative assessment)
- Encouraging dialogue between PGRs and their supervisors
- Aware of requests from examiners for guidance, too

Approach: Consultation

- Once we had a first draft, we utilised our networks to seek input from internal and external academic experts in the field
- Identified an intersection with research ethics and integrity and consulted accordingly with the relevant team
- Engaged with Educational Enhancement Team who were leading work in the education space to ensure consistency of approach
- Student Administration (inc. academic regulations)
- Obtained buy-in of academic lead (Dean of the Sussex Researcher School)

Committee approvals

- Ensured space was given within the key committee agenda to allow time to discuss the draft statement
- While it sparked some wider debate about GenAI, and there was some discussion about some specific wording within the document, the committee welcomed a statement to support discussions with PGRs about the use of GenAI
- Worked in a (very) minor amendment prior to review by subsequent committees
- Due to be published August 2025 (*subject to Senate approval*)

Learning

- GenAI is a topic about which knowledge and understanding is evolving at differing rates within and between institutions, and which can elicit often strong opinions
- Don't run before you can walk:
 - Be reflective about the limitations of your own knowledge and be open to being challenged
 - Read a range of perspectives
 - Lean on your experts
 - Take account of the whole institutional context
- Present as a living document, in recognition of the speed at which the landscape is developing, and commit to reviewing it regularly

The Statement

The statement itself will be available to view via the following link from the 01 August 2025. It will be embedded within the Procedures on Research Degrees (Appendix 6):

<https://www.sussex.ac.uk/internal/sussex-researcher-school/researcherdev/postgraduate-research-policies/regulations>

We will add information and sign-posting to our PGR- and supervisor-facing webpages prior to the start of the new academic year.

Questions?



Further reading

In no particular order:

- <https://ukcge.ac.uk/events/aiethicsjan25>
- <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/technology-uk/article/thirsty-chatgpt-uses-four-times-more-water-than-previously-thought-bc0pqswdr>
- <https://time.com/6247678/openai-chatgpt-kenya-workers/> (*NOTE: this article contains references to and descriptions of sexual abuse*)
- [Embracing AI with integrity](#) (UKRIO)
- [Supremacy](#) by Palmy Olson *Pan Macmillan 2024, ISBN 9781035038251, 1035038250 (Financial Times Business Book of the Year winner 2024)*

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